

Mosel Avenue Grade Separation
Spanning Riverview Drive
Kalamazoo
Kalamazoo County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-36

HAER
MICH.
39-KALAM.
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Mosel Avenue Grade Separation

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MICH,
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3-

Location: Spanning Riverview Drive on Mosel Avenue in Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo County, Michigan

UTM: 16.617780.4685835

Quad: Kalamazoo, Michigan

Date of Construction: 1924

Contractor: General Builders, Inc. of Kalamazoo, Michigan

Present Owner: Kalamazoo County Road Commission
3801 E. Kilgore Road
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49002

Present Use: Vehicular and pedestrian bridge; to be demolished in 1990.

Significance: One of only two surviving concrete girder camelback bridges in Michigan with sidewalks built as an integral part of the original structure. This was unusual, as most of the bridges were built in rural areas where sidewalks were not needed. It was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places on April 1, 1986.

Project Information: This document was undertaken in June 1989 in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement by the Kalamazoo County Road Commission as a mitigative measure prior to the removal of the bridge.

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Kalamazoo County Road Commission
Kalamazoo, Michigan

The grade separation was constructed as a component of an important project on Kalamazoo's north side. The project improved access to the area and benefited nearby industries and the developing community of Parchment. At a regular Kalamazoo Township Board meeting, held on February 24, 1923, a petition, signed by 40 township freeholders, was presented. The petition requested the board to issue bonds, not to exceed \$75,000, to extend Mosel Avenue from Pitcher Street to River Road. The borrowed money was to be used for graveling the extension and to construct a concrete bridge over the Kalamazoo River and over the right-of-way of the Michigan Railway Company. A motion was made and carried to draw up a resolution for the bonds to put before voters in the spring. [1] At the April 2, 1923, election, voters authorized issue of the bonds. Bids for their purchase were received from the First National Bank of Kalamazoo, the Paine Webber Company, and two other firms. The bid from the First National Bank was accepted. [2] On April 15, 1923, board members traveled to Lansing, Michigan, to seek state aid. [3]

The road work was awarded to the Kalamazoo Construction Company in May 1923. J. P. Rusche of Grand Rapids received the river bridge contract in early summer 1924 and, several months later, General Builders, Inc. was hired to construct the grade separation.

The Michigan State Highway Department prepared the grade separation plans. The bridge bears a nameplate entitled "State Reward Grade Separation." Under Section 27 of Act 283 of Public Acts of 1909, as amended, the State Highway Commissioner was empowered to build grade separations on Trunk Line, Federal Aid and State Reward roads, subject to certain restrictions. The restrictions are noted in the Commissioner's Tenth Biennial Report (ending fiscal year June 30, 1924). The report explains that State Reward Grade Separation funds were to be taken from highway funds not otherwise appropriated and that no such funds had been provided up to that time. [4] The policy appears to have applied to this work, for the Eleventh Biennial Report lists the grade separation, but indicates no state participation in its estimated \$28,170 cost. [5]

The bridge was constructed to carry Mosel Avenue over the interurban. The electric railway had been open between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids since 1915, and one of its benefits was to provide cheap transportation for men living in Kalamazoo and working at the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company in Parchment. [6] The line was powered by a third rail reported lethal to touch. [7] Increased popularity of autos, trucks and buses cut into revenues and, in 1929, all passenger service on Kalamazoo interurban lines ceased. [8]

In 1929, jurisdiction of the grade separation also changed. All of Mosel Avenue, from River Road to one mile west, was transferred from the township to the Kalamazoo County Road Commission. [9]

Need developed for the improvement of the road from Kalamazoo to Parchment. The city engineer for Kalamazoo presented persuasive arguments for building a new highway in the old interurban right-of-way as opposed to reconstruction on the existing road alignment. [10] A plan and profile for the relocation of Riverview Drive (formerly River Road) under the bridge was prepared in October 1942. [11] Construction of the new highway occurred over the next two years.

In 1953, Federal Aid Secondary funds were used to reconstruct Mosel Avenue. During this work, the bridge deck was paved with bituminous mix. [12] An overlay in 1974 also included the grade separation. [13] In 1985, remedial measures were taken to prevent flaking concrete from endangering traffic passing below. Decayed concrete was removed from the bottom of the deck to the level of rebar and handrail spindles were enclosed in timber planks. [14]

This structure is a single span reinforced concrete camelback bridge. It is 50 feet long and 36 feet wide. Two massive girders carry a 22-foot roadway and a five-foot sidewalk on the south side. Provisions were included for an additional sidewalk on the north side. Both girders also serve as traffic rails. The pedestrian handrail is made of concrete posts and spindles. Plans indicate that molds for precast spindles were supplied by the state. [15] Minimum vertical under clearance over traffic lanes is 15 feet, four inches. Horizontal underclearance is 46 feet. Abutments are of counterforted design.

It is notable that the Michigan Railway Company requested a span of 60 feet, but the township board favored a span of 40 feet. [16] The 60-foot span was considered an unreasonable expense. [17]

Besides the grade separation, there are two more concrete camelback bridges in Kalamazoo County. One is the East Michigan Avenue bridge over the Kalamazoo River near Galesburg and the other is Mosel Avenue river bridge.

The bridge building activities of General Builders, Inc. of Kalamazoo were limited to a brief period of time. The 1926 Kalamazoo city directory reveals the firm was incorporated in August 1924 and was located at 325 East Main Street. [18] It was listed as a general contractor. [19] In the 1927 directory, the firm's top executive officer had changed and it was listed as a plumbing, heating and ventilation contractor. [20] The next available directory, the 1929 edition, and subsequent directories do not list the firm.

FOOTNOTES

- [1] Township of Kalamazoo, Township Proceedings, vol. 2, April 1, 1895 to December 26, 1936, p. 293.
- [2] Township of Kalamazoo, p. 303.
- [3] Township of Kalamazoo, p. 298.
- [4] State of Michigan, Tenth Biennial Report of the State Highway Commissioner, for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 1923 and June 30, 1924, p. 20.
- [5] State of Michigan, Eleventh Biennial Report of the State Highway Commissioner, for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 1925 and June 30, 1926, p. 160-161.

- [6] Willis F. Dunbar, "Our Interurban Era - Only the Memory Remains," The Kalamazoo Magazine, December 1963, p. 26.
- [7] Dunbar, "Our Interurban Era," p. 26.
- [8] Dunbar, "Our Interurban Era," p. 27.
- [9] County Road Commission, Kalamazoo County, Record of Minutes, vol. 3, April 9, 1923 to December 14, 1931, pp. 760-761.
- [10] Andrus to Wyckel, letter, City of Kalamazoo, May 2, 1942.
- [11] Kalamazoo County Road Commission, Plan and Profile of Relocation of Riverview Drive, prepared by William H. Wilkins, October 30, 1942, 2 sheets.
- [12] Kalamazoo County Road Commission, Plan and Profile of Proposed Federal Aid Secondary Project No. Michigan S 1195(1), 1953, sheet 9 of 9.
- [13] Paul S. Pyles, General Superintendent, Kalamazoo County Road Commission, Interview, June 20, 1989.
- [14] Kalamazoo County Road Commission, bridge inventory and inspection file, Mosel Avenue over Riverview Drive folder.
- [15] Michigan State Highway Department plans, Bridge File No. 3907001, 1924, sheet 1 of 5.
- [16] Township of Kalamazoo, p. 315.
- [17] Township of Kalamazoo, p. 316.
- [18] Polk's Kalamazoo City Directory 1926 (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers), p. 31.
- [19] Polk's Kalamazoo City Directory 1926, p. 87.
- [20] Polk's Kalamazoo City Directory 1927 (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers), pp. 220, 690.

